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FM AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO
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INFO WHA CENTRAL AMERICAN COLLECTIVE
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANTO DOMINGO 001303

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ETRD](#) [PREL](#) [ETTC](#) [CU](#) [DR](#)

SUBJECT: CUBA: COUNTRY BY COUNTRY REVIEW FOR SUSPENSION OF TITTLE III
OF THE LIBERTAD ACT (DOMINICAN REPUBLIC)

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 30

CLASSIFIED BY: Alexander Margulies, Political-Economic Counselor,
State, ECOPOL; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

¶11. (C) In response to Ref A, Post finds the Dominican Republic (DR) has made no marked changes to its relationship with Cuba since the last report (Ref B). Although some educational and medical exchanges exist, the DR has very few investments in Cuba and no bilateral trade agreement. Post asserts that U.S. national interest and the Government of the Dominican Republic's (GoDR) actions with respect to Cuba, and its limited relations with the Castro regime justify the continued renewal of the suspension of Title III of the Libertad Act with regard to Dominican business.

RESPONSES TO REF A's INQUIRY

¶12. (C) Has the host country, in Post's opinion, worked to promote the advancement of democracy and human rights in Cuba? ANSWER: In general, the DR supports the advancement of democracy in the region, although it has not been vocal with respect to Cuba, as it has with respect to the coup in Honduras.

¶13. (C) Has the host country made public statements or undertaken other governmental actions, such as resolutions in national assemblies condemning human rights abuses in Cuba; or actions in support of civil society in Cuba through the host country's diplomatic missions or other fora? ANSWER: The DR has publicly promoted the advancement of democracy and human rights in general, but not with specific reference to Cuba.

¶14. (C) Have there been any high-level diplomatic visits between Cuba and the host country in the past six months? ANSWER: Raul Castro's daughter, Mariela Castro, visited Santo Domingo in September 2009 and was received by President Leonel Fernandez. Fernandez visited Havana in March 2009 - slightly more than six months ago - where he met with Raul and Fidel Castro. According to media reports, in the meeting with Fidel Castro, President Fernandez discussed baseball, Cuban literacy programs, and general bilateral cooperation. During his meeting with Raul Castro, Fernandez reportedly invited the Cuban leader to visit the DR.

15. (C) What is the nature of investments (and names, if known) that host country businesses have in Cuba? Are there any bilateral trade agreements or other cooperative agreements between host country and Cuba? ANSWER: According to Embassy sources, there are few Dominican investments in Cuba, though government officials have mentioned their interest in strengthening the trade relationship. Previously, legitimate businesses were afraid to do business in Cuba given the political climate between the United States and Cuba, though some interpret recent steps taken on Cuba by the USG to be a sign of reduced tensions. The DR does not have a bilateral trade agreement with Cuba. In 2008, the DR exported USD 60.7 million worth of goods to Cuba; no data is available on imports, which presumably are negligible.

16. (C) Are there any exchange programs between host country and Cuba, including but not limited to: scholarships for host country nationals to study in Cuba; Cuban-paid medical travel for host country nationals; and Cuban doctors working in the host country? ANSWER: The DR has formal interactions with Cuba in the areas of medicine, education, sports, and industrial property. Under an agreement between the DR and Cuba, Dominican medical professionals are permitted to attend six years of medical school in Cuba. Graduates of the program receive a degree as a general practitioner. Cuban doctors come to the DR to provide medical services at some local underserved hospitals, but not in a quid-pro-quo fashion.

17. (C) COMMENT: The GoDR is reluctant to criticize Cuba too openly for domestic political reasons as both major parties, the governing PLD and the opposition PRD, have sizeable leftist sectors. President Fernandez likes to present himself as the ideal mediator/interlocutor between the U.S. and the countries we find troublesome in the region (Venezuela, Cuba), pointing to his good relations with all parties. Fernandez would also be hesitant to offend Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, whose PetroCaribe program provides essential financing to the cash-strapped DR. In addition, the GoDR and the Dominican private sector are wary of Cuba as a potential competitor in the tourism sector, which contributes approximately 16 percent of the DR's GDP. Government officials and international financial institution representatives have explicitly mentioned to us their concerns that a tourism-driven recovery in the DR could be negatively affected should Cuba open further in the near-term. END COMMENT.

Lambert